The Moscow Times
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Sberbank Finalizes Mail.Ru Partnership

The pair seal a new tie-up which could see Sberbank take a 20% slice of Mail.Ru.

November 19, 2019



Sberbank's pivot away from Yandex and towards Mail.Ru has accelerated with a new deal which could see the bank take a 20% slice in Mail.Ru. **kirill Zykov / Moskva News Agency**

Russian corporate heavyweights Sberbank and Mail.Ru have finalized a new strategic partnership just one day after Sberbank confirmed it would step-back from its role in tech giant Yandex.

In a series of announcements, Sberbank and Mail.Ru confirmed today the terms of a new joint venture to cover their food and taxi businesses, which the pair say will be worth be than 100 billion rubles ($1.6 billion), and could see the state-owned bank take a 20% stake in Mail.Ru.

The deal puts Mail.Ru's Delivery Club and CitiMobil businesses, plus Sberbank's own FoodPlex arm into a single joint venture, and gives Sberbank the option to cash out in exchange for a 20% stake in Mail.Ru after three years.

Related article: Russia's Yandex and Mail.Ru Report Strong Growth Despite Ownership Threats

Sberbank has also today bought an 11 billion ruble ($177 million) stake in one of Mail.Ru's investors, MF Technologies. That investment immediately gives Sberbank a 2% economic interest in Mail.Ru, but due to the tech company's corporate structure, Sberbank will control 21% of the voting rights in Mail.Ru, giving it a significant say over the company's strategy.

The tie-up is the latest move in Sberbank's pivot towards Mail.Ru and away from its top competitor, Russia's most valuable tech company, Yandex. In a corporate shake-up announced yesterday, Sberbank is set to relinquish its so-called "golden share" in Yandex, while Yandex also refused to say whether Sberbank CEO German Gref would retain his seat on its board of directors when it comes up for renewal next June.

In a statement announcing the new deals, Gref said: "The agreements we've signed with Mail.Ru usher in our joint projects, as well as the beginning of a closer cooperation, in which we'll be able to bring together our technological and intellectual resources along the way. We believe that our partnership will significantly enhance digital economy in Russia."

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/11/19/sberbank-finalizes-mailru-partnership-a68230